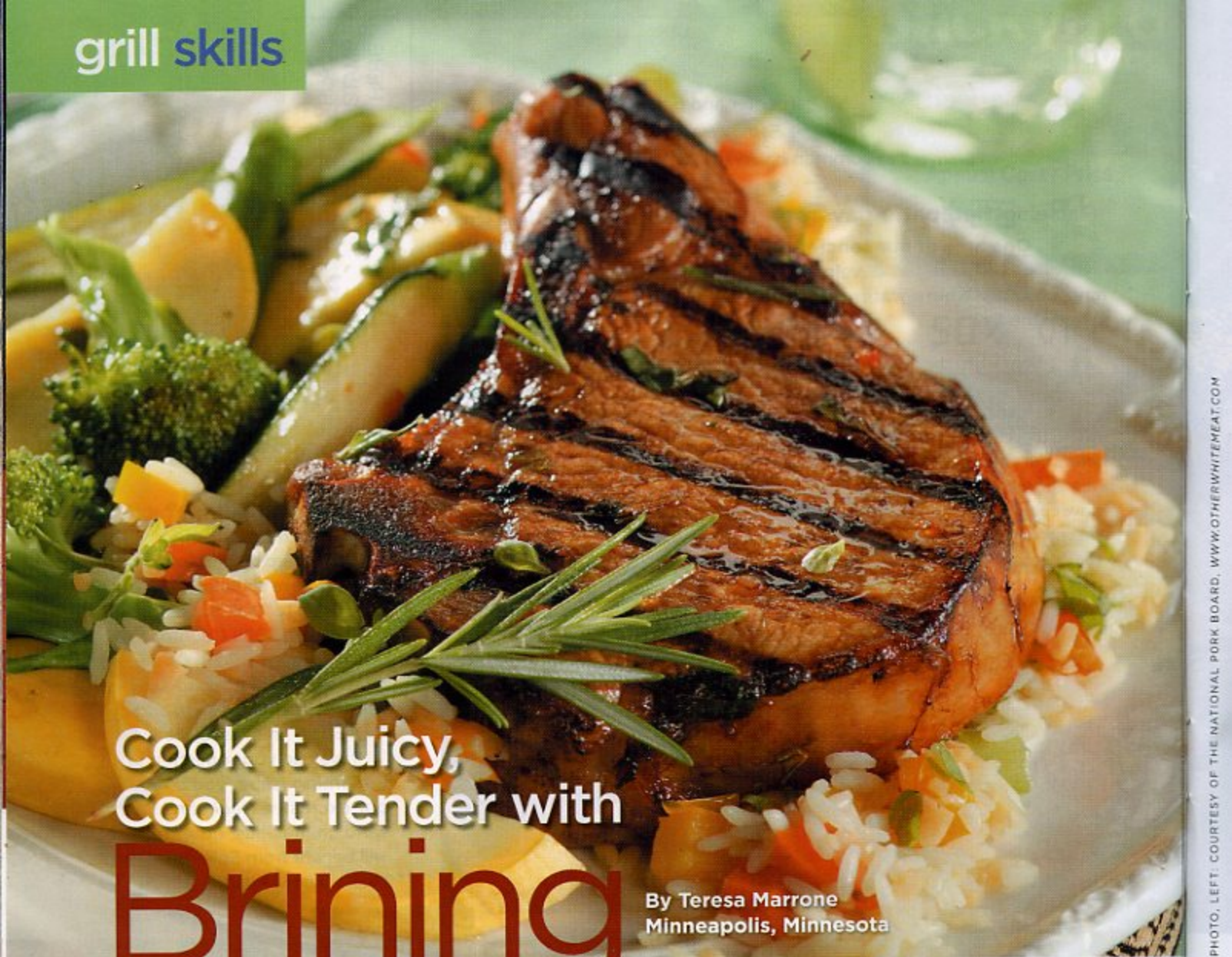


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Cook It Juicy, Cook It Tender with Brining

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ever wonder why the grilled chops or chicken you get at a restaurant are so juicy and tender, while those you prepare at home seem better suited to a woodworking project? Chances are good that the chef used a “secret method” before your food hit the grill – the secret is brining.

During cooking, meat proteins tighten and shrink, squeezing out juices, which can make the meat dry. The proteins also bond together tightly as the temperature increases, which can make the meat tough. Brining before cooking does two things: It draws moisture into the meat, and it loosens the protein structure so it doesn't bind together so tightly during cooking. The result is juicy, tender meat. As a bonus, the meat is literally seasoned from within by the salt solution.

Pork and poultry benefit the most from brining because they lack internal fat to baste the meat during cooking. Choose plain meat for brining; pre-basted turkeys, koshered chickens and “enhanced” pork have already been treated.

Game birds such as pheasant and partridge, which tend to be dry, also get a real boost.

The best salt for brining is coarse kosher salt, which is free of additives and has a clean taste. Canning/pickling salt also works well. Don't use rock salt, “lite” salt, salt substitutes or curing salt, such as Morton Tender Quick.

Due to their crystal sizes, different types of salt require different amounts (see the photos on page 21). Use cold water, unless you're flavoring the brine; add the salt to the water and stir until dissolved. If you need more brine (for a turkey, perhaps), make additional batches at the same ratio until you have enough to cover the meat.

HOW LONG TO BRINE

Food	Brining Time
Large shrimp	20-30 minutes
Whole or halved quail	45 minutes
Cornish game hens or partridge	1 hour
Thin pork chops	1 to 2 hours
Cut-up chicken or pheasant	2 to 3 hours
Thick pork chops	3 to 4 hours
Whole chicken	3 to 4 hours
Cut-up turkey	4 to 6 hours
Pork roast	5 to 6 hours
Whole turkey	12 to 18 hours

For added flavor, add up to 1/2 cup brown or white sugar (for 2 quarts brine), or substitute apple juice for part or all of the water. For another variation, add 1 tablespoon mixed pickling spice to the brine mixture; heat to boiling, then cool completely before adding the meat (sugar works well with this option). You may also add herbs, red pepper flakes or other spices for flavor.

To hold the meat and brine, choose a nonreactive (glass, ceramic or food-safe plastic) container. Place the container on a rimmed baking sheet to catch drips. If necessary, use a small ceramic plate to keep the meat submerged, and then cover the container with plastic wrap. For smaller items, such as chops, poultry parts or shrimp, a zipper-style plastic bag works great. Place the food in the bag and add brine to fill; seal the bag, squeezing out the air. Place the bag in a dish to contain leaks.

Refrigerate the meat for the time noted in the chart above; don't brine longer, as the meat will be too salty. Rinse the meat and pat it dry, then refrigerate until you're ready to grill. Discard the brine after use. Don't add additional salt to the meat during grilling, although other seasonings can be used.

Note that brined meats cook a bit more quickly because the additional moisture conducts heat better, so check for doneness a bit sooner than usual. Remember that temperature is the best way to judge doneness of meat and poultry; this is particularly important because brined meat may have a slightly pinkish tinge even when properly cooked. ★



CANDIDATES FOR BRINING

include whole or cut-up poultry and game birds, pork chops or roasts, and large shrimp. For extra flavor, you can add seasonings such as mixed pickling spices to the brine.



FOR 2 QUARTS WATER,

use one of the following amounts of salt, depending on the salt brand: 1/2 cup canning/pickling salt; 1 cup Diamond Crystal Kosher Salt; or 3/4 cup Morton Kosher Salt. Make enough brine to completely cover the meat.



COMBINE MEAT AND BRINE

in a nonreactive container; cover and refrigerate for the time indicated in the chart. Don't over-brine, or the meat will taste too salty.



RINSE THE MEAT

under cold running water after brining. Pat dry with paper towels. Refrigerate until you're ready to grill.

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